DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 574 CG 026 828

AUTHOR Short, Rick Jay; Talley, Ronda C.
TITLE A Psychology of Education Reform.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Children; *Educational Change; Educational Development; *Educational Psychology; Elementary Secondary Education; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *National Education Goals 1990; Psychological Influences

ABSTRACT

The lack of progress in education reform initiatives may be the conspicuous absence of psychology in policy and planning for reform. Although psychological theory and research underlie much of educational practice, educational policy and the educational literature seldom cite psychological contributions to the improvement of education. This article advocates the use of psychological principles in meeting the six goals of national education reform. These national education goals have been promoted as a standard for American education to be attained by the year 2000, yet they actually constitute a broad pattern for comprehensive services for children and adults that address health, social needs, mental health, and development. It is believed that psychological principles, research and expertise are fundamental to effective planning and implementation of education goals. Psychological research on early childhood development, drop-out prevention, standards for psychological and educational assessment, use of scientific knowledge, contributions to adult learning, and increased school safety can make direct contributions to national education goals. Although psychology's role in education reform has not yet been prominently displayed, it can be an important component of educational improvement. (RJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 404 574

A Psychology of Education Reform[1]

Rick Jay Short and Ronda C. Talley
The American Psychological Association

Although health care reform recently has dominated the attention of the American public and its health professions, concern for education reform preceded the current interest in health care reform by at least a decade. These two historic, yet inter-related, initiatives may represent mileposts on the larger road to social reform in the United States. *A Nation at Risk* (1983), an early assessment of the status of American education, generated considerable concern about the competitiveness of Americans in the global marketplace. The President's Education Summit (1989) addressed this concern by establishing a widely-cited set of goals for American education to be attained by the year 2000. The Educate America Act, a legislative initiative to formalize and fund these targets, currently moves through Congress. Despite massive national attention, however, relatively little progress toward the goals has been achieved. Although it now appears unlikely that they will be met by the target date (National Education Goals Panel, 1993), education reform efforts continue at the national, state, and local levels.

An important reason for the lack of progress in education reform initiatives may be the conspicuous absence of psychology in policy and planning for education reform. Although psychological theory and research underlie much of educational practice, educational policy and the educational literature seldom cite psychological contributions to the improvement of education. Frank Farley, Ph.D., current President of the APA, cogently noted this disparity:

> In my view, a central reason for the slow progress in reform is the relative absence of *psychology* in the equation for educational change. The principal target of education reform should be the *minds of kids*. If the minds of kids are not the bull's eye, then we're not going to much improve education. We will simply be rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. No discipline is more sure-footed on the mindscape of kids than psychology. Psychology is the core science of mind, and without psychology's signature on the blueprint for education reform, reform will fail. Therefore, it is imperative that we advocate for a *psychology of education reform* (Farley, 1993, p. 15).

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R.J. Short
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CG026828

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Education Reform Extends Far Beyond the Schoolhouse

The national education goals have been promoted as a standard for American education. However, the education reform movement as embodied by the goals actually constitutes a broad pattern for comprehensive services for children and adults that addresses health, social needs, mental health, and development as well as education. Whereas American education traditionally has occurred within the confines of the school building, education reform cannot be achieved without a coordinated, integrated, and interdisciplinary effort that also includes parents, social and health agencies, and communities. In fact, service delivery within education reform and the proposed health care reform may share many mechanisms and objectives. These two reform movements, sometimes overlapping and sometimes in parallel, may provide psychology with an unprecedented opportunity to redefine psychological service delivery for the 21st century.

The national education goals also have provided a foundation for current and proposed national policy. Almost every legislative initiative related to children, including the Health Security Act, include specific language to ensure consistency with education reform legislation. Similar language appears in legislation for juvenile justice, youth violence, technology, elementary and secondary education, educational research, and other diverse initiatives. To advocate for psychology's role in almost any existing human services legislation, we must address the critical influence of education reform initiatives on children's services mandates.

Why Psychology is Important to Education Reform

Psychological principles, research, and expertise are fundamental to effective planning and implementation of education reform. In addition to these psychological foundations, psychologist practitioners have much to contribute to the conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation of strategies to meet the goals of education reform, and psychology must be active and visible in these activities. Some of the key roles that psychology has played in conceptualizing and implementing fundamental educational change in each national educational goal are noted below. Although the list obviously is not exhaustive, it provides examples of the types of contributions that psychology has already made to education and education reform.

Goal 1: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

Psychology's contribution to the knowledge base on prenatal and postnatal child development is well known. This information has been used to design prevention and early intervention programs to promote the intellectual, emotional, social, and educational growth of infants and toddlers through such notable programs as Head Start and, more recently, Healthy Start. Psychology has been instrumental in advocating for Goal 1 to apply to all students, not only preschool children, stating that it is essential to provide services to learners of all ages to ensure that as they start each day, each student will be supported to learn.

Goal 2: By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%.

Psychologists have developed successful drop-out prevention programs and have addressed issues which deal with student motivation and curriculum relevance. They add to the research base on those factors which lead to school failure and also design individual and system interventions to alleviate this societal problem. The work which psychologists do to reduce student alienation and social isolation is essential in tackling this issue.

Goal 3: By the year 2000, American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, and every school in American will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern society.

Psychology has a major role to play in addressing this goal because of our unique position in setting standards for psychological and educational assessment. With new forms of assessment being developed to determine if content-based standards in the disciplines are being met, members of the education community are looking as never before to psychology as a potential leader in evaluating reform innovations. Psychologists' expertise in individual and group assessment meets an essential need for evaluating progress. Additionally, their research and interventions in problem-solving and other cognitive processes provide essential tools for teaching efficient and effective use of mental capabilities.

Goal 4: By the year 2000, American students will be the first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

As a scientifically based discipline, psychology has a responsibility to promote the acquisition, utilization, and evaluation of scientific knowledge. While psychological measurement expertise will be useful in determining progress toward achieving this goal, the newly merging knowledge base of cognitive psychology applied to mathematical thinking also offers exciting possibilities for furthering achievement in scientific disciplines.

Goal 5: By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Psychology's contribution to adult learning and individualized instruction has been well documented. Psychological researchers have made major strides in understanding literacy. Further, psychologists have provided leadership in the development of interventions to reduce adult illiteracy through such programs as those developed by the National Center on Adult Literacy. In addition, social psychology has contributed to the development of interventions which facilitate the acquisition of interpersonal skills to promote successful work performance.

Goal 6: By the year 2000, America's schools will be safe, disciplined, and drug free and will provide an environment which is conducive to learning.

Work in this area has been a traditional strength of psychological practice and research, both within and outside of the schools. For example, the focus of Goal 6 on safe, disciplined, drug-free schools addresses behavior management, youth violence, substance abuse, and organizational climate. All of these dimensions have been traditional strengths of psychological research and practice, both within and outside of the schools.

Why Education Reform is Important to Psychology

Although psychology's role in education reform has not been yet been prominently displayed, its importance to educational improvement is undeniable. However, education reform also may be critical to psychology and psychologists. Developments in education reform policy probably will influence strongly the nature of psychological research and practice in all areas related to children, families, and communities. Additionally, such developments may determine funding levels and priorities that provide essential support for our research and practice. Specific ways that education reform is important to psychologists include the following.

- ***Our practice***. A clear change in emphasis with respect to service delivery is apparent in current and pending policy and legislation, including those concerning education reform. Emphasis on specialized care for clinical populations seems to be yielding to a more preventive, comprehensive orientation targeted at specific social and health problems such as intentional injury and substance abuse. Schools and educational agencies represent primary settings for the delivery of services with this orientation, and the education reform goals may provide an opportunity for psychology to extend its practice to new populations and models.

- ***Our relevance and identity.*** Education reform also provides an opportunity and a challenge for psychology to demonstrate its relevance in achieving specific goals in one of America's more comprehensive institutions. Psychological research historically has provided an important data source for educational theory and practice; however, the *psychological* nature of this research often may be lost in the integration of information from diverse sources into educational programs. Similarly, psychological interventions often are mainstays of educational practice, but are implemented by and identified with practitioners other than psychologists. A critical challenge to psychology is its ability to inform its publics of the extent and significance of psychology's contribution to reformed educational practice.

- ***Our children.*** Psychologists often are parents as well as professionals. Even though our professional role or practice may be unrelated to schools, we and our children are consumers of services provided by the educational system. As personal stakeholders in schools, we have compelling reasons for using our psychological

expertise to inform education reform efforts and to influence policy decisions to reflect the best knowledge of children, educational practice, and service delivery.

- ***Our employment.*** Education reform issues embody the life work of many psychologists. School, educational, clinical, counseling, developmental, and cognitive psychologists are employed to provide essential knowledge to inform reform decisions and to provide services to students, faculty, and families at a variety of levels. The absence of psychology from the reform dialogue leaves psychological service providers in schools vulnerable to job restriction and loss. More important, psychology's absence relinquishes a critical opportunity to ensure adequate numbers of psychologists to establish the comprehensive delivery of psychological services through health education and health service delivery.

from Farley, F. (1993, November/December). The Education reform summit: Psychological science goes to school. *APA Psychological Science Agenda*, *6*(6), 15.

Prepared at the request of the APA Board of Educational Affairs, 1993.

Complete citation:

Short, R. J., & Talley, R. C. (1993). A psychology of education reform. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Center for Psychology in Schools and Education.